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"JUGGLING IDENTITIES" A YOUTHFUL PERSPECTIVE ON THE QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR.

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The East Timorese movement has received renewed prominence in many parts of the world, increasing the importance of the roles of the participants But what significant implications does it pose for a young East Timorese, whose only known boundaries have been greatly defined by the influences of Australia and its society?

Many East Timorese youths are confronted with the difficult challenge of dealing with the daily demands and pressures of every day life in Australia, without mentioning the efforts exerted in maintaining and establishing an East Timorese identity. For some, language alone is the greatest obstacle demanding concerted attention and time. Without a sound grasp of the English language, the other facets of life remain stagnant. Often enough, the quest to function efficiently within the framework of Australian societies, has the tendency to force young people to associate themselves to a Timorese identity, which encompasses only the visible and material aspects of the culture. The other dimensions of an identity, such as the feelings of nationalism and pride, and the extensive comprehension of traditions and customs, are absent and far removed. A possible explanation is the challenge of trying to identify oneself and one's position in two diverse cultures, speaking specifically in reference to East Timor and Australia It is this dilemma which keeps many young Timorese from furthering their exploration and enhancement of knowledge over the question of East Timor, resulting in a non active approach to the struggle Without doubt, young attitudes towards the cause progress no further than what is embedded in the well recognised "juggling of identities" . there is no depth in the comprehension of the issues which have forced them to move onto Australian soils, rather, knowledge acquired extends only to the locality of East Timor, certain cultural practices and the fact that Indonesia illegally occupied their island home

The life of a young East Timorese , living in Australia, is best described in terms of a conflict. At one end of the spectrum, there is the struggle to succeed and to fit into the Australian societal structures It is a part of human nature to seek comfort and acceptance in an environment, to ensure survival, a process universally recognised as adaptation. But there is also the need to explore your ancestral routes, to question what it means to be an East Timorese. Understanding the historical path which has contributed to your very being is essential in fulfilling a broad comprehension of your own identity, and will aid the search conducted by young East Timorese, of where they fit in the wider Australian community

When asked directly "what does it mean to be an East Timorese?" the responses comprise of elements mentioned earlier, those that are visible or materialistic like in character What is interesting to observe is that the behaviour of most young Timorese reflects an inconsistency with their responses. By inconsistency, I mean that the behaviour displayed illustrates a closer affiliation with the Timorese identity,

and almost a subconscious sense of nationalism. During social activities, like sports for example, the youths proudly express the fact that they are Timorese. Win or lose, there is a loyalty which exists between them, and there is an open acknowledgment of their Timorese nationality. There is also a willingness to participate in Timorese activities, whether it be the commemoration of the November Dili Massacre, to the U.D.T foundation day celebrations, or even to participate in traditional dancing and singing for cultural night presentations. Where the need is required, participation is always provided by a majority of the East Timorese youths.

THE IMPACT OF THE 1991 NOVEMBER DILI MASSACRE

Addressing the question of East Timor was once seen as the responsibility of the older generation. Why? Because the younger Timorese did not grow up in Timor, nor were they exposed to the turmoil, which erupted in 1974. This distanced the youths from the problem, and thus it appeared as though responsibility was removed from, or maybe even never placed in their hands. The gap that was created also stemmed from a lack of knowledge, not only in relation to the debating issues, but knowledge over what contribution could be made to improve the situation in East Timor. Available sources of information included parents, peers, texts, and literature, and some media coverage's. But the scope of the reality was limited to interpretations influenced by experiences in Australia and not within East Timor. There was and still is no personal experience attached to the knowledge acquired. The extremity of suffering experienced in Australia is not parallel to that existent in East Timor. Life in Australia is a marked contrast to that in East Timor. Media coverage in Australia is also censored, so that what really does occur in East Timor is never really known to the young East Timorese living in Australia.

The impact of the 1991 November Dili Massacre can be characterised in terms of a turning point in the lives of many young East Timorese living in Australia. It introduced an element of "visual reality" to an issue that was only ever spoken about, and transcended down by the mature people of the community. By witnessing young lives suffering in a manner so unfamiliar to those experienced by East Timorese youths who have grown up in Australia, opened many eyes to some of the issues underlying the struggle. It triggered an understanding of the kind of life led by the people in East Timor, the fact that the regularity of their lives occurs under a blanket of fear and death, simply because they are fighting for their legal rights to freedom and independence. The media release of the massacre showed that the majority of the participants were young people themselves, and this alone aroused a sense of personal responsibility and obligation amongst the Timorese youths in Australia, to claim the struggle as their own. For some, it was the case of the event being a personal matter because of the loss of the lives of family members. For others, it was observing young people like themselves, dying horrendously and without reason. It was the thought that it could have been me or you, had our directions in life been modified somewhat.

The massacre exerted immense impact on developments in East Timor. It raised public awareness world wide, but especially within the East Timorese youths, about the level of nationalism that exists within East Timor today. The Santa Cruz massacre exposed the deceit of the Indonesian Government in attempting to portray the reality

of East Timor as being so called "normal" and peaceful. It installed within many youths a sense of pride, that a small nation, who seemed alone in its struggle before the massacre, endured and continued its fight despite the lack of support. Thus was clearly evident with the presence of numerous young people in the demonstrations held in Australia, commemorating the massacre and the innocent lives that were lost.

As a result of the awakening, brought about by the footage of the massacre, more and more young East Timorese wanted to contribute towards enhancing the progress of the movement. The question of "how" became of increasing importance It is at this point, that Timorese youths are caught in crossroads, "juggling" the difficulties of which identity to assume in approaching the movement

U.D.T AND ITS INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IDENTITY

Within the small city of Perth, Western Australia, there exists a U D.T youth group, which has been functional for a period of approximately seven years The group was formed along the principles of democracy, and was based on the idea of being an educational and supportive tool for young East Timorese The whole concept of a U.D T youth group was to introduce a new avenue from which youths could acquire educative historical and current information about East Timor, as well as about responsibilities in the world It is a group with the positive attribute of being youth driven, where all decision-making processes take place amongst the young people themselves The group initiates many activities, which encourage East Timorese youths to interact amongst each other, as well as with others in a positive way. Thus strong friendships evolve from such activities. The central objectives of the activities are to encourage the growth of cultural affiliations by ensuring that the young people practice various aspects of the culture For example, the requirements that group names, in certain activities, have to be a term that is in Tetun It has established a channel through which young voices can be projected and heard, in relation to the situation in East Timor

U.D.T has always been actively involved in ensuring that young Timorese are equipped with an awareness about the facts which have made East Timor the issue that it is today, and has taken the responsibility of educating them so that the struggle may continue to gain momentum and strength. It has taught many young people about the importance of educating others about the cause, so that support may be gained. The elder members have ideally guided and supported many youth driven initiatives, which have installed a sound sense of confidence, and boost of the self esteem. This has often comforted many of the difficulties that are confronted, when dealing with cross-cultural issues The U.D.T groups have always reinforced the idea that any contribution to the movement, regardless of how big or small, is of a beneficial nature Young women are continuously encouraged to become more involved, and are provided with the same equal opportunities as is provided to the young men.

In evaluating the influence of U.D T in the development of an identity, it can be said that U D T is a consistent source of information and support. The people have effectively operated in building strong and confident youths, who are ready to

encounter and overcome obstacles which may intervene in their successes. U D T has worked hard to install within the young people, the nationalistic pride that was once absent or denied. And in a world where females are often discriminated against, or denied the same equal opportunities, U D T has done nothing but support and encourage their participation and contributions. U.D.T has attempted to provide a solution to some of the dilemmas faced by the young people, in relation to which identity or stance to assume in approaching the movement. Education has always been reinforced as being the key to opening the eyes of the world.

DILEMMAS IN EXPECTATIONS.

Being an ethnic group within Australia is a challenging status. And what is often not realised is that the challenge is accentuated for younger beings who are juggling not just two cultures, the traditional and mainstream culture, but also a youth subculture. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult enough having to learn to adjust to an environment which contrasts that of your parents, or one you were once familiar with, but it is even more difficult having to deal with young people who live in a society which has no real idea of the kind of pain that your people have had to endure, or for the period of time that they have had to endure it for. East Timorese youths struggle to gain acceptance, but at the same time they strive to set free their home country. For many the boundaries of expectations are sometimes unclear, or do not seem to fit into the ideas of today. Sometimes it becomes a case of not wanting to be a victim or outcast within the Australian youth subculture, so the easier solution is to remain passive. There is the desire to assume an East Timorese identity and to work effortlessly for the cause, but this is often obstructed by the demands of schoolwork, inter-generational conflicts, racism or other pressures associated with a youth subculture. Australia is a country where most of the youths have never really had to be politically active, or they have never had a national cause that has threatened their very being. This, of course, not being in reference to other ethnic youths living in Australia, for most have come from a war torn background and have had experiences paralleling those of the East Timorese youths. There is sometimes a lack of understanding, because of an absence of experience, over the work that is devoted to East Timor. This lack of understanding can often lead to insensitivity. What a young person wants most is to feel as though they belong or fit into the society in which they live. But how possible is this, when those around you are unaware of the difficulties that you have to endure. Growing up in such an environment has influenced the way in which some young Timorese may think. There is doubt over what they are expected to do, how they should do it, and whether it is achievable. Without prior exposure to conflicting issues, such as that which pertains to East Timor, it is difficult to know where to start, and to assess if you are moving in the correct direction. The expectations of others may seem too far stretched, but reliance on your own expectations may not seem to be a solution. There is the expectation to succeed, and to survive the so-called Australian lifestyle, but there is also the expectation to strengthen cultural affiliations. Two demanding expectations often creates an imbalance, because attending to one may mean neglect over the other. So the question of what to do is difficult to answer.

CONCLUSION

It is important for young East Timorese to recognise that East Timor's cause is not just a case of the fight for self determination and independence, but entails becoming more knowledgeable about the political environment which set the movement into motion. It is this knowledge and understanding about the structure and ideologies of both U D T and Fretilin which will enrich the future democratic state of a 'FREE' East Timor. It is often difficult to engage in political activity, when you are caught in the dilemma of abiding by an older generation's expectations and ideas of a political movement, and the pressures of redefining ideas to fit into today's societal framework. The question of East Timor, in all its essence, does contain a political element, engraved in history. Thus it is our responsibility to raise political awareness within ourselves and in others. But what we, as the future of East Timor's cause, must distinguish is that both parties function with the intent of achieving the one objective of freedom and independence for East Timor.

For many young Timorese, the Australian lifestyle is all they know, with some injections of Timorese influence. For other Timorese youths, it is a matter of cross-cultural dilemma, learning to adapt to the Australian way of life as well as attempting to maintain the traditional national identity. With this in mind, we are left with the question of whether the youths of today, who are not so close to the problem because we were not present during the eruption of the turmoil, are equipped to make a more objective and extensive contribution to finding a resolution to the question of East Timor? With dedication and the continual search for not only knowledge and education, but also ideas, the young people of East Timor can also contribute towards the resolution. They may not be so close to the problem, but they have exposure to the technological changes and other progresses of today, which will advance the movement.